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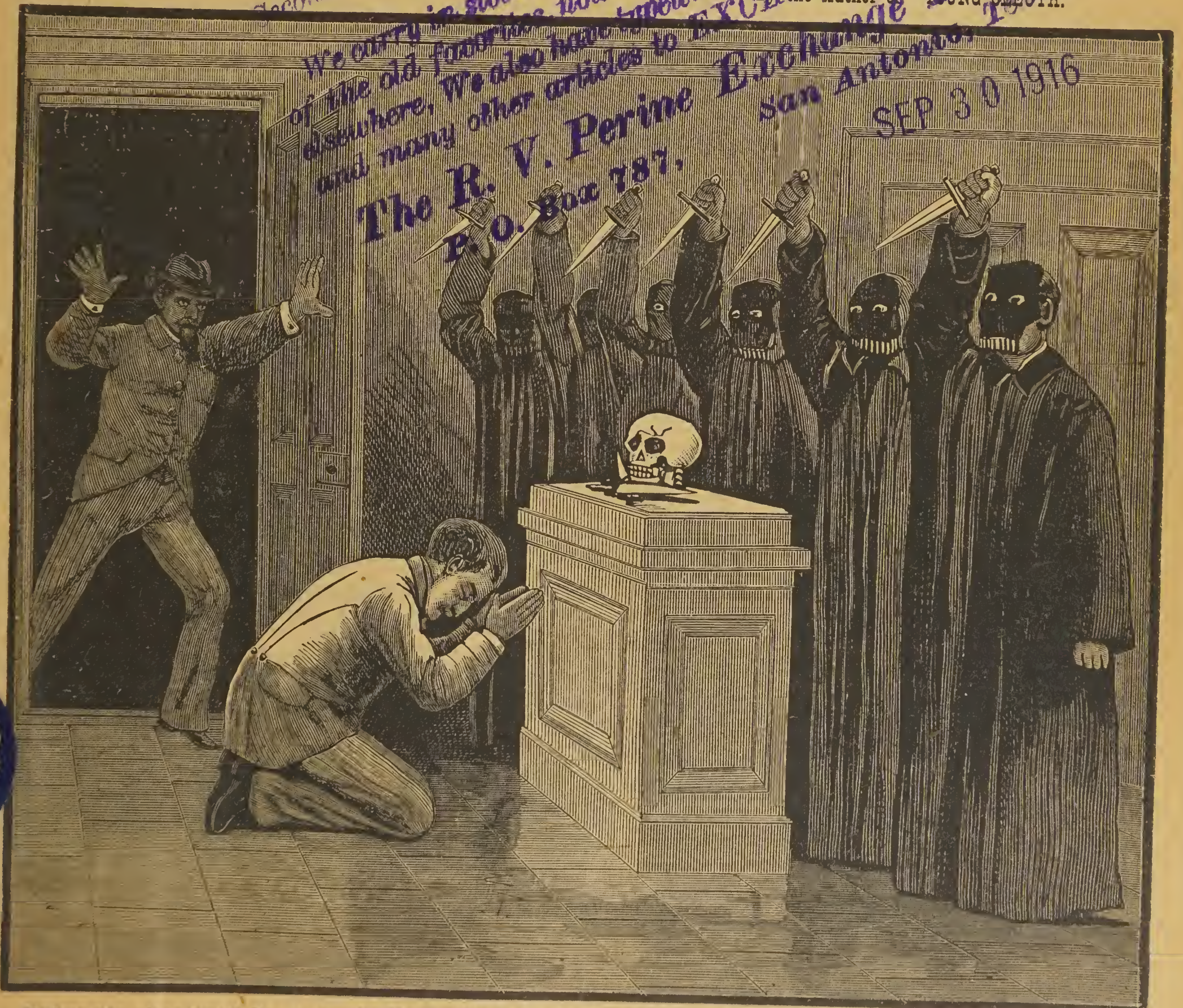
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Vol. I.

Young Sleuth and the Masked Lady

By the Author of "YOUNG SLEUTH."



Before the altar knelt Bagshot. As Young Sleuth entered and paused, enchained by the strange, weird scene, the man in the center of the masked six just behind the altar stepped back.

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YOUNG SLEUTH AND THE MASKED LADY:

OR,

The Queen of the Avengers.

By THE AUTHOR OF "YOUNG SLEUTH."

CHAPTER I.

THE QUEEN OF THE AVENGERS AT HOME.

"So you have come at last?"

"As you see."

A beautiful woman was the first speaker.

The second was a tall, dark, fiercely handsome man.

The scene was a luxuriously appointed room in a private dwelling in New York.

The lady half reclined on a Turkish divan.

In her small, elegant and bejeweled hand she held a lighted cigarette.

And a whiff of aromatic blue smoke was wafted from her lips as she spoke.

The man had just entered.

He regarded the beautiful woman with a look of admiration.

"I sent for you because I fancied you could be of service to me," continued the lady.

She spoke in a cold, business-like tone.

And at the same time indicated a seat.

He took possession of the chair, inquiring:

"Why have you sent for me?"

"First, let me ask you a few questions."

He bowed.

"You are well acquainted in New York?"

"Fairly so."

"You are known as Richard Bagshot?"

"I am."

"You are a gambler?"

"Well, yes."

"And you are just at the present time in need of money?"

"Evidently there is little need for me to acquaint you with my affairs."

And "Dick" Bagshot, as intimate called him, frowned.

He had met this woman a month previously, at the race-course.

A passing acquaintance had sprung up between them.

The woman was introduced to Bagshot under the name of Madam Bertrand.

She posed as a female "plunger" on the turf.

Her bets were heavy.

She won largely.

And as she possessed the power of fascination, she became popular with a shady class of race-track men.

Bagshot had neither heard or seen anything of the woman for some time, when on the day of which we are writing he had received a note from her.

The message bade him call.

And he had done so.

Her uncourteous greeting had surprised and angered him.

His face showed it as she questioned him.

And she seemed to take a malicious pleasure in the observance.

"Don't get angry, Mr. Bagshot—or perhaps you would prefer me to say Daniel Lee!"

The man addressed started.

His face paled instantly.

He stared at the woman, and his lips moved, but he did not speak.

"I know you," she went on.

"In Heaven's name, who are you?"

He leaned forward, clutching the arms of his chair with both hands.

She blew a cloud of smoke from the cigarette.

And while she daintily fluffed the ashes away from the glowing point, she said, quietly:

"I am Judith Hickman."

"The Queen of the Avengers?" he gasped.

"The same."

"What do you want of me?"

The face of the man had become one of abject terror.

He glanced at the door.

And a cold sweat broke out upon his brow.

"I want your life!" was the startling rejoinder.

And the slithered foot of the woman came in contact with the knob of an electric bell in the floor.

The man sprang to his feet.

And he wheeled toward the door.

As he did so the portal opened and three tall dark figures—three men each wearing a somber mask—appeared there.

He recoiled.

"You see you are in my power. When you renounced the Mormon faith and fled from Utah you were doomed."

"Merciful heavens! The years have changed you so I did not know you, Judith Hickman, the Danite's daughter."

"I presumed not."

"Do you mean—murder?"

He asked the question breathlessly.

And there was something of supplication in his tone.

A gleam of satisfaction flashed into her dark eyes.

"I said I wanted your life."

"But you will not—"

"Hold! I will tell you frankly there is but one way in which you can save your life."

"From the Mormon Avengers?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"By taking the oath of the Danites anew."

He shuddered.

"And by swearing to serve me, if you can convince me you can be of assistance to me, in finding Donald Marvan—"

"I can. Ha! I see you are willing to spare me because I am of little importance compared with the man who—"

"Silence! Speak not of the deeds of the man whom the Mormon Avengers have sworn to hunt down."

"I will be silent."

"I am aware you know all."

"Yes."

"And it has come to my knowledge that you are probably in possession of information I want."

"Regarding Donald Marvan?"

"Yes."

"It is true."

"Will you pledge yourself to help me?"

"I will."

"You will join the Avengers—you will take the oath?"

"Yes."

The lady waved her hand.

The masked men in the door vanished as silently as they had come.

And the portal was softly closed behind them.

Bagshot, as we will call him, seemed to have considerably regained his composure.

And he said with savage earnestness:

"But I would make one request."

She frowned but replied quietly;

"What is it?"

"I want the girl—carse her, look here!"

He tore open his shirt at the throat.

She saw a red scar.

"Her work! The tiger cat, she stabbed me!"

"To save herself from a fate worse than death perhaps."

"It matters not. I owe her something for that. I would have my revenge—make her mine—my slave!"

The fierce brutality of the man's tone caused the woman to look at him with an expression of disgust.

"Do you mean to say Bertina is with him—with Donald Marvan?"

"I do—or, that is to say, rather she will be with him."

"When?"

"When I lead you to him."

"And when will you do that?"

"In one week."

"Good!"

"Then you agree?"

"That you shall have the girl?"

"Certainly."

"I do."

"It is then a bargain. I am Donald Marvan's friend. I will betray him to the death league of the Mormons in one week."

"Well, I have a deep plan to get Marvan in the power of the church of latter-day saints. We dare not kill him here in New York."

"Why not?"

"Because, though we could assassinate him secretly, his death alone will not satisfy the destroying angels."

"I don't understand."

"There is a reason why the secret league of the Mormons desire to get Donald Marvan back in the Mormon country."

"Ah! I suspect he holds some secret."

"Never mind that."

"Have you any further business with me?"

"I have."

"What is it?"

"To-night at twelve you will meet the agents of the league."

"Where?"

"In this house."

"I will be here."

"See to it that you do not fail."

"After the ceremony of the renewal of your vows is over I will tell you more."

"Very well. I am at liberty now then to bid you good-day?"

"You are."

Bagshot bowed himself out.

Judith Hickman, the Danite's daughter, touched the electric bell again.

A bright, handsome girl, in the modest costume and cap of a fashionable lady's maid, entered.

"Jennie, did you deliver my note?"

"To the detective?"

"Yes—to Young Sleuth."

"I did."

"Did he send an answer?"

"He did. Here is the note."

The maid placed the missive in the hand of the Queen of the Avengers.

CHAPTER II.

THE HUNTED MAN.

A WEEK before the occurrence of the incidents we have recorded, Young Sleuth, the greatest detective on the inspector's staff of brilliant officers and his cunning French assistant, Jenkins, were alone in the young special's rooms one morning.

They were conversing in an animated manner.

"Ah!" said Jenkins, "she is superb! *Mon Dieu!* Never have I seen a female magician that could compare with the masked lady. Such grace, such a form, divine, and her voice, it is music!"

Young Sleuth laughed.

"You are susceptible. But I confess all reports of the masked lady agree with yours," he said.

"It is so."

"This remarkable deft female magician of the Wonder Museum has piqued and mystified New York."

"*Mon Dieu!* Such a coup—such a scheme to create a sensation! The audience never sees the face of the beautiful magician!"

"No! Then how do you know she is beautiful?"

"Oh, can you ask? *Mon Dieu!* She must have a beautiful face."

"Well, I understand neither on or off the stage has any one seen her face."

"That's so."

"You and I have witnessed the performance of the masked lady several times?"

"We have."

"And the museum manager has assured us that he is besieged with bribes to let the admirers behold the face of the masked lady."

"But he had to refuse."

"Yes, because he has never seen the face of the masked lady himself."

"And her contract with him binds him to protect her secret."

"So he declared."

"I suppose the mask is merely a cunning dodge to win notoriety."

"Yes. And yet there was something in the dark eyes of the female magician which caused me to decide she is a woman with some set purpose—some masterful design."

"Beyond success, as a female magician?"

"I confess I have allowed my imagination to dwell upon the possibility."

"And so have I."

"It seems to me she would not refuse to drop the mask upon occasions among known friends in private life, if the assumption of the mask was merely for the stage."

"That idea has occurred to me."

At that juncture the conversation was interrupted.

The bell rang.

Jenkins answered it.

He ushered a tall, splendidly built man into the presence of Young Sleuth.

The detective's guest wore a magnificent black beard.

His eyes were dark as midnight.

His figure was that of a gladiator.

When he doffed his hat it was seen he had a high and noble forehead.

"I believe I have the pleasure of addressing M. Sandoval, the Animal King," said Young Sleuth.

"The same."

"I have seen you in the lions' den."

"Ah! In the drama at the theatre?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are Young Sleuth?"

"I am, and this is my trusted assistant, Mr. Jenkins."

"Beg pardon; Jean Guillaume St. Croix Jenkean, a nobleman in exile," put in the eccentric valet.

The lion tamer smiled.

"I have called, Mr. Sleuth, to consult you."

"Professionally?"

"Yes, sir."

"Proceed freely. I have no secrets from Mr. Jenkins."

"Very well. I want you to ascertain for me if the face of the masked lady magician is that of this photograph."

M. Sandoval drew a card photograph from his pocket as he spoke.

And he handed it to Young Sleuth.

The latter received the picture.

Holding it to the light he scanned the pictured face closely.

He saw a dark, strikingly handsome woman.

But there was something stern and determined in the expression of her orbs.

"Will you undertake this work for me?" continued M. Sandoval.

Young Sleuth answered:

"I cannot commit myself until I know more."

"You want to know my motive?"

"I do."

"It is not necessary."

"I consider it is."

M. Sandoval looked surprised.

And his eyes flashed.

"You see, sir, I never undertake a detective's inquiry which parties may wish to set on foot for dishonorable motives."

"Do you mean to suggest, sir—"

"Not at all! Not at all!"

"I beg your pardon, you are quite right, and you are the man I want—a man of honor."

Young Sleuth bowed.

And he rejoined, as he extended the photo:

"Precisely. And unless you can convince me it is for the best interest of justice and right that I should unmask the masked lady for you, I will not undertake to do so."

"Then I'll tell you all."

"Thanks."

"In the first place, my real name is not M. Sandoval."

"No."

"I assumed that title when I became a public performer."

"A lion tamer?"

"Yes."

"And your real name?"

"Promise me you will never reveal it?"

"Never. If in justice to myself and my duty I can keep the secret."

The voice of the lion tamer dropped to a whisper.

He said:

"My real name is Donald Marvan."

It was the name of the man the Queen of the Avengers wanted to find and drag back to meet a terrible fate among the Mormons.

But of all that Young Sleuth as yet knew nothing.

The name pronounced did not move the special.

"Donald Marvan!" he repeated.

"Yes. You have never heard the name before?"

"No."

"Well, it was well known among the Mormons years ago."

"Were you then in Utah?"

"I was then a Mormon. I was duped and flattered and cajoled until I joined the accursed sect. They wanted my money, and when they had despoiled me, they learned I meant to flee from them and they sought to kill me. But I escaped, killing a Danite in self-defense, and securing a bag of treasure—the wealth which had, for the most part, been mine, and hiding it from my pursuers."

M. Sandoval paused.

Young Sleuth and Jenkins waited for him to go on.

Presently he resumed.

"The Danite I had to kill to save myself was the son of a Danite chief—and the betrothed of the daughter of another Danite."

"Yes, you interest me deeply," observed Young Sleuth.

"The name of the girl Mormon is Judith Hickman, and it is her photograph I gave you."

"Then you suspect—"

"That Judith Hickman, the Danite's daughter, and the masked lady magician are one and the same."

"Why do you wish to unmask her?"

"To save my life."

"What do you mean, man?"

"Let me further explain."

"Do so by all means."

"Judith Hickman swore to execute a terrible vengeance upon me because I slew her Mormon lover in self-defense. An apostate Mormon, who escaped after I did, has told me a thrilling story."

"Let us have it."

"You shall hear it all."

The Lion King seemed to think for a moment before he continued as follows:

"After my escape, in secret session in the temple in Salt Lake, the

Danites swore to hunt me down, bring me back to Utah to answer to the wrongful charge of murder in a Danite secret court, and mete out to me a horrible death, when I had been made to reveal where I had hidden the treasure the Mormon I killed was bearing to the bank of the Latter-day Saints."

"But the woman—Judith Hickman?"

"She was chosen Queen of the Danites, or Avengers of the Mormons."

"Ha! Then you believe Judith Hickman, the woman chief of the secret slayers of the Mormon church, in the person of the masked lady is on your trail?"

"Yes."

"Why so?"

"I have seen her *en masque*."

"On the stage?"

"Certainly."

"Well?"

"The mask covers all her face."

"I know."

"But you can see her eyes through the holes in the mask."

"Yes; I, too, have seen the masked lady magician."

"Something in that woman's eye frightened me."

"You suspected then she was Judith Hickman?"

"I did."

"But were not sure?"

"Of course not."

"Well, I will undertake your case."

"Thanks, thanks!"

"But do you really fear the woman, if she is Judith Hickman?"

"I do."

"Can she have recognized you?"

"I think not."

"You do not look as you did when she knew you."

"No."

"Suppose we learn the masked lady is really the Queen of the Avengers?"

"Then I shall be on my guard against her, and will know what to do. I hold a terrible secret of that woman's."

Sandoval added a few words which seemed to excite Young Sleuth strangely.

CHAPTER III.

THE BEAUTIFUL DUMB MYSTERY.

WHEN he had concluded his thrilling revelation, the animal trainer placed a sealed packet in the hand of Young Sleuth.

"What am I to do with this?" asked the special.

"Keep it for the present."

"All right."

"If anything happens to me open it."

"And then?"

"You will find the proof."

"Of the secret?"

"Yes, of the terrible secret which I hold relating to the Queen of the Avengers."

"I will do as you say."

"Thanks."

"Not at all."

"I feel that if Judith Hickman is here in New York other foes are near."

"Of the old Danite League?"

"Yes."

"I thought those secret assassins were a thing of the past."

"By no means."

"You surprise me."

"As long as the Mormon church exists the Danites will be in existence."

"But of late years we have heard nothing of them."

"No. They dare not commit the terrible crimes they formerly did."

"The government has too strongly exerted its power against them?"

"Yes, but secret crimes that are never brought to light are yet committed by the Danites."

"I presume so."

"I fear an attempt will be made to kidnap me."

"You must be on your guard."

"I shall be, but if anything should happen to me, what would become of poor little Bertina?"

"Your daughter?"

"No. A girl I picked up under strange circumstances."

"Indeed!"

"A young and beautiful girl."

"Ah!"

"And one who has been deserted by all who should have cared for her."

"Have you adopted her?"

"No, not legally."

"Do you mean to do so?"

"Perhaps—anyhow, I shall protect and care for her with the same care as if she was my daughter."

The man spoke earnestly.

"Perhaps you can help me about Bertina, too?"

"In what way?"

"To find out who and what she is."

"What do you mean? Has she told you nothing?"

"No."

"That's singular."

"She is dumb."

"But she can write?"

"No, at least it seems not."

"That is strange."

"How old is the girl?" continued Young Sleuth.

"About seventeen, I should judge."

"Is she intelligent?"

"She is."

"I must see her."

"Then her case interests you?"

"It does. How did you say you found her?"

"I did not say," and Sandoval smiled.

"That's so. Do you object to telling me?"

"No."

"Then please do so."

"I found Bertina, late one night, insensible in a doorway."

"Pardon me. Did you bestow the name of Bertina?"

"I did not."

"Then how, if the wail is dumb and cannot write, do you know her name is Bertina?"

"She wore a plain gold ring."

"With the name Bertina on it?"

"Yes. That name was engraved on the gold band."

"Was there anything else inscribed there?"

"Nothing."

"Had she anything about her to give a clew to her identity?"

"Not a thing."

"So as to who she is, whence she came and why she was lying senseless on the street at dead of night, is a sealed mystery."

"It is."

"Is she contented with you?"

"To a degree."

"But not entirely?"

"No."

"Have you placed her under any restraint?"

"Do you mean am I detaining her?"

"Against her will, yes."

"No, sir; she is as free as the air."

"But makes no attempt to go away?"

"No. She will scarcely leave my rooms."

"What is her manner?"

"That of one in fear of something."

"Ah! The poor child may have had cruel experiences."

"Yes. I am sure of it."

"Is there anything more?"

"Yes. I had almost overlooked one fact."

"What is it?"

"There was a great blood stain on the arm of the girl's dress."

"When you found her?"

"Yes."

"Was she wounded?"

"No, sir."

"Whence came the blood?"

"That is another puzzle."

"When can I call upon you?"

"And see Bertina?"

"Certainly. I am so much interested in her strange case I should like to do so as soon as possible."

"Say to-night."

"Very well."

"Here is my card. You will note my home address on it."

"Yes, at what time shall I call?"

"Before theater time; you know I have to appear with my trained lions in the first act of the play."

"Yes, I will call early."

"Then I will now bid you good-morning."

In a moment Young Sleuth and Jenkins were again alone.

That evening Young Sleuth proceeded to the home of Sandoval.

The lion tamer opened the door.

And he ushered Young Sleuth into a neatly furnished room.

The daring performer of the lions was alone.

He greeted the detective warmly.

"The young lady, Miss Bertina?" the detective asked,

"I will call her."

"If you please."

The lion tamer stepped to the door.

"Bertina!" he called in kindly tones.

"Then she can hear," said the detective.

"Perfectly."

The next moment a young girl entered the room.

She was slender and graceful.

Her pale, lovely face was lighted up by tender brown eyes.

And just then those soulful eyes wore an expression of alarm.

Seeing a stranger the silent maid shrank back.

She would have retreated.

But Sandoval hastened to say, re-assuringly:

"Do not fear; this gentleman is a true friend of mine."

"And I would be your friend, too," added the special.

"Miss Bertina, Young Sleuth, the detective."

Bertina started as if she had received a blow.

And every trace of color fled.

She stood there white as snow and suddenly sprang behind Sandoval.

To him she clung as if for protection.

"Why, as I live, the girl is afraid of you!" exclaimed the lion tamer.

"Yes. She took sudden new alarm when you mentioned I was an officer."

"It is so."

"But she has no cause to fear me."

"True enough."

"Aside from yourself, I will be her best friend."

"I am sure of it."

Then to Bertina:

"Do not fear. This young man is here to help you."

She shook her head negatively.

"Don't you want my help?" asked the detective.

Again a negative nod.

"But you want to find your friends? You want to go home?"

Again she signified the officer was wrong.

"She is beyond my comprehension," he said.

"See here, Miss Bertina, don't distrust me," he added.

She looked at him fixedly.

"If there is any reason why you don't want to go home, why you fear to do so, you shall not go. No, you shall stay here."

She smiled.

"And if any one has harmed you, I will find and punish them if you wish."

She shook her head to say no.

"All right. Then I won't trouble you."

She looked her thanks.

"But if at any time you should change your mind, you have only to let our good friend Sandoval here know."

"Yes," said the lion tamer, "and if anything should happen to me so I cannot protect you, rely on Young Sleuth."

"Here is my card," and the special placed it in her hand.

"Come or send to me in time of need," he added.

CHAPTER IV.

YOUNG SLEUTH RECEIVES A STRANGE MESSAGE.

THE mysterious dumb girl bowed and smiled, and then tears came into her great brown eyes.

"Don't cry, Bertina. We don't know what your troubles are, but if we ever find out, we'll do our best to set everything right," said the special.

Then Sandoval signified that she might retire.

Bestowing a look of confidence upon the young officer, she glided out of the room.

The lion tamer closed the door behind her.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"I really don't know what to think exactly."

"Have you formed a theory?"

"Hardly. I begin to have definite suspicions though."

"What are they?"

"That Bertina is in deadly fear of some one."

"My own idea."

"That she does not want any one who knew her before you found her to find her now."

"You fall in with my views precisely."

There was some further conversation about the mysterious dumb girl.

Suddenly Young Sleuth startled Sandoval.

He exclaimed:

"One important question is whether or not she is really dumb."

"What! You don't think she is shamming?"

"Such a thing is possible."

"Why should she seek to make us believe she is dumb if she is not?"

"We won't go into that now," replied the officer, and he soon left the house.

Having returned home, he told Jenkins all.

"Ah, *mon Dieu*! Who ever heard of such a strange mystery?" exclaimed the Frenchman.

"Certainly I never did."

"Is she really dumb?"

"Bravo! You have hit upon an important point at once."

"She might have a motive for deception."

"That's so."

"But what do you say?"

"To avoid telling anything about herself she may have resolved to pretend that she can neither speak nor write or communicate in any other way."

"Grant that, and you must assume she has something to conceal."

"Yes, and something of vital importance to herself."

"Surely so."

"You remember the lion tamer said when he found the girl there was blood on the sleeve of her dress?"

"Yes."

"To my mind that suggests a suspicion."

"Of what kind?"

"Of a dark character."

"That the girl may have been concerned in a crime?"

"Yes."

"I had thought of that."

"Do you agree with me?"

"No," replied Young Sleuth.

"Why not?"

"Because I have seen the girl."

"Ah! And she impressed you as an innocent?"

"One look into her pure face and honest eyes dispelled any such suspicion as you suggest."

"Are you sure?"

"I am."

"Then the mystery is deep indeed."

"It is."

There was further conversation then.

But neither Young Sleuth nor his assistant was able to formulate any theory to present a probable solution to the mystery.

Bertina remained a mute Sphinx.

She was a living enigma.

But Young Sleuth meant yet to get at the bottom of the mystery, and yet restore the poor girl to home and friends, if such, indeed, she had.

The following evening Young Sleuth went to the Wonder Museum.

We have taken the liberty, for obvious reasons, to change the name of the place of amusement.

There he saw the masked lady on the stage.

She went through her usual performance as a female magician.

Young Sleuth sat out the performance.

But when it was ended he was in doubt.

He could not surely identify the eyes of the masked lady as the same as those of the photograph of Judith Hickman—the Queen of the Avengers.

The next day he called at the home of Sandoval and reported.

After that he and Jenkins set in to "pipe" the masked lady.

But for a week they failed to learn anything of great importance.

And they did not obtain a glimpse of her face.

They located her boarding place, but learned she employed no one, not even a maid, and that no one at the boarding place had ever seen her face.

Further, Young Sleuth learned the masked lady spent the most of her time away from the boarding-house.

But where?

That he could not find out.

He and Jenkins shadowed the boarding-house.

Several times they saw the lady come out, and she always wore a thick veil over her mask, so as not to attract attention on the street.

The two detectives followed the masked lady.

But on every occasion she had eluded them with remarkable cleverness before they could track her to any destination.

The day which witnessed the meeting of the masked lady, without a mask, with Richard Bagshot, the recanting Mormon, as described in the opening chapter, came, and found Young Sleuth as much in the dark as before.

That afternoon he received a note.

He received it at the hands of a small, plainly dressed young girl at his rooms.

She requested an answer.

Young Sleuth read the note, which ran as follows:

"DEAR SIR—If you are willing to undertake a case for a person, whose identity will not be revealed to you, but who will pay you well and convince you what is required of you to perform is just and right, meet the agent of the author of this at the Grand Central Hotel at 4 o'clock P. M. to day. Ask at the clerk's desk for Richard Bagshot."

There was no signature.

A peculiar look came into the eyes of the shrewd young detective.

He had noted the provision that the identity of his employer was not to be revealed.

And he entertained a suspicion, which was, to say the least, somewhat thrilling.

He answered the note.

In the message he agreed to meet the agent of the unknown.

This was the note which Jennie, the maid of the masked lady—otherwise Judith Hickman—gave to her mistress.

But the house in which the incidents we have related in the first chapter took place, was not the boarding house in which the Queen of the Avengers dwelt, in the character of the masked lady magician.

No. This remarkable woman, bent upon vengeance, and the execution of the mandates of the merciless Mormon league, was living a double life in New York.

It was at the house where she met Bagshot that she spent all the time when she was away from her boarding-house.

And it was to that house she had gone every time when she had eluded the detective.

There she lived as Mrs. Bertrand, a rich widow.

And she had around her as servants and attendants only sworn members of the Danite death-league.

The maid, Jennie, was the daughter of one of the Danites of the household.

When the girl who gave Young Sleuth the note from the Queen of the Avengers left the detective's house, he sent Jenkins to shadow her.

But the girl proved too keen for the Frenchman.

She dropped to his pipe.

And she eluded him as neatly as her mistress had previously done.

Jenkins returned and reported his failure.

Meantime, as soon as the Queen of the Avengers had read the note from Young Sleuth, she exclaimed:

"I'm losing my head! I should have detained Bagshot until I received the detective's answer. Jennie, call Dyke."

"Yes, madam."

The girl withdrew.

In a moment a powerfully-built, sullen-looking man with red hair and beard strode into the room.

Without a word he stood before the woman chief and waited for her to speak.

"Dyke," she said, "go to the Grand Central. See Bagshot. Perhaps you will overtake him; anyhow, bring him here."

"Yes, madam."

And the Danite withdrew.

From the window the female chief of the Avengers looked into the street.

She saw Dyke.

He was speeding away.

"Faithful and swift, I can always trust Dyke," she muttered.

The Danite soon returned.

He had overtaken Bagshot.

And the ex-Mormon returned with him.

A long interview followed.

The Queen of the Avengers fully instructed Bagshot in the part she wished him to play, when Young Sleuth called to see him at the hotel.

CHAPTER V.

THE DETECTIVE TAKES BOTH SIDES.

WHEN he had heard what the woman had to say, Bagshot cried out:

"I don't approve of this!"

"Why not?" sternly.

"Because I've already agreed to deliver my friend, Donald Marvan, up to the death league."

"You fool! I told you we did not mean to kill him here in New York!"

"Yes."

"Then in order to get him safely back among the Mormons, I want to make it out that he is being legally taken to Utah."

"I see."

"To accomplish this I want the services of a detective."

"And so you engage Young Sleuth?"

"Yes."

"I fear you have made a mistake in choosing your man."

"Why so?"

"Young Sleuth is called the keen detective."

"Well?"

"He may drop to the game."

"No. He shall be completely duped. He shall think Donald Marvan is a red-handed murderer—a fugitive from justice. Mormon influence will secure the necessary extradition papers to enable us, with a show of legality, to take Marvan back to Utah."

"Then what caused you to spare my life if you could do this thing without me?"

"I wanted you to point out Marvan to the detective. No other member of the death league can do that."

"No, for Marvan is changed, and he has a new name."

"But, understand me, you are not to openly—so that Young Sleuth will see your hand—point out Marvan."

"How then?"

"You must manage to put in the detective's way the clues to lead him to Marvan."

"Without allowing the detective to find out I have anything to do with his success in finding his man."

"Precisely."

"And you can let it happen that the girl Bertina is with Marvan, and that she is arrested by Young Sleuth as the accomplice of the man the death league will execute."

"In Utah?"

"Yes."

"And you will take Bertina back there?"

"If you wish."

"I do wish it. Ha! once again in good standing with the church I shall not fear to return."

"You need not."

"And in Mormon land Bertina will be in my power."

"Yes—hopelessly so."

"Then I'll pay her back. I'll beat her! I'll treat her like a dog! I'll break her spirit," he hissed.

"Bagshot," said the woman, calmly, "you are a villain and a coward."

"But you want me to serve you. You would doom a man. I would doom a girl; which is the worst?"

"Enough!"

"And you do not know all that girl cost me, and then, when I was sure of her to lose her, as I did! Ha! she has nerve and an iron will, that slip of a girl."

The Queen of the Avengers laughed.

Snarling in his beard Bagshot stalked out of the room.

At four o'clock Young Sleuth presented himself at the Grand Central Hotel.

He passed immediately to the clerk's desk.

"Is a Mr. Richard Bagshot stopping here?" he inquired.

"He is."

"Can you tell me if he is in?"

"I will see."

The clerk struck a bell.

A boy came up.

"No. 108, second floor."

"Take my card, and if the occupant of the room is in, deliver it," said the special.

The boy took the card and withdrew. But he returned to say the gentleman was in, and he showed the officer up to Room 108.

"Mr. Sleuth, I am delighted to see you," said Bagshot, when he had ushered the young officer into his room.

"Thanks. I have called in answer to this note."

The detective placed the message from the unknown in the hand of the ex-Mormon.

"Ah, I supposed as much! Be seated."

He proffered a chair.

Young Sleuth accepted it.

"Now to business," he said.

"To be sure. The case which my client wishes to employ you on may be briefly outlined."

Bagshot paused, took out a note-book and went on:

"The facts are these: Some seven years ago, one Charles Hinkley, of Utah, was foully murdered by a man called Donald Marvan. The crime was due to jealousy about a woman. The assassin and his victim were both Mormons. The guilt of Marvan was clear. There were three witnesses to the crime, but Marvan escaped, mounted on the swiftest horse in Utah.

"The family of Hinkley is a wealthy and highly respectable one, though they are of the Mormon faith.

"Very well. They made every effort to secure the arrest of Marvan, but they failed.

"For years all traces of the red-handed assassin was lost.

"But recently he has been discovered to be in New York.

"He is supposed to be living under an assumed name.

"Years have no doubt greatly changed his appearance, and with a trifling disguise, he may feel perfectly safe."

Bagshot paused.

The trained detective had not made the slightest change in the expression of his face when the ex-Mormon uttered the real name of poor Bertina's protector.

Yet it gave him a mental shock.

He saw he was becoming involved in one of the most remarkable cases he had ever known.

"Then you want me to locate this Donald Merwin?"

"Marvan," corrected Bagshot.

"Oh, yes, that was the name!"

"Yes, my client, who, for personal reasons which have nothing to do with the ends of justice, wishes to remain unknown in this affair, so desires."

"Am I to arrest the criminal?"

"Of course."

"And then?"

"He will be extradited and sent back."

"To Utah, eh?"

"Yes, for trial on the charge of murder."

"It may be a difficult matter to locate the fellow."

"True."

"Can you give me a description of him?"

"Yes, or better still. Look here."

Bagshot produced a photograph.

It was that of Donald Marvan, and it had been taken in Salt Lake City.

The date was more than seven years previously.

He gave the picture to Young Sleuth.

An ordinary man might not have identified the picture as that of the man now known as Sandoval, the animal king, or lion king as the case might be.

And yet the keen detective knew the photograph was that of the hunted man who had already employed him.

The keen detective set in to play one of his deep games.

And he mentally asked himself this question:

"Which story is true?"

The situation was a singular one for a detective.

One client claimed he was hunted by murderous fanatics who meant to drag him back among their people to be put to death as an innocent man.

The other client stated the first was a red-handed assassin, whom all the laws of God and man directed should answer for his crime at the tribunal of justice.

Sandoval was a comparative stranger to the detective. He had not verified his story.

The last statement which he had just heard might be true. There was no better proof in one case than the other.

The special determined to take both cases, hoping in that manner to finally learn the truth, and in the end fully meaning that justice should be done.

"Very well. I will retain this photo. It may assist me," Young Sleuth presently said.

"Then you will take the case?"

"Yes."

"Good! I rely on you."

"And I shall get to work at once."

"One point more. We have reason to suppose that a young girl called Bertina Merlin, who was the accomplice of Donald Marvan in the murder in Utah, has fled and joined the assassin here."

"Ha!"

The other did not notice the singular and significant force of this exclamation.

He went on:

"Of course we desire you should, if possible, apprehend Marvan's girl accomplice as well as himself."

"Certainly. How am I to know the girl?"

"I will describe her."

He did so.

"The beautiful dumb girl," commented the officer, mentally.

CHAPTER VI.

OPENING UP A DARK GAME.

"You will report to me," continued Bagshot.

"I will."

"When you wish to do so you will call here."

"Very well."

"Now, as to your fees?"

"Never mind that now."

"Do you wish a retainer?"

"In advance?"

"Yes."

"I do not! I'll make out my bill when the case is ended."

"As you will."

"Is there anything more?"

"There is."

"Please state it."

"I merely wish to give you a few words of warning."

"About what?"

"About Marvan."

"What would you say?"

"He is a remarkably powerful man."

"Indeed?"

"And a dangerous one."

"I shall be on my guard."

"You should be."

"Do you think you would recognize Marvan if you saw him now?"

"I do."

"Even if he was changed and slightly disguised?"

"Yes."

"Good! Then you may help me to recognize him."

"Yes, in case you think you have found him."

"But am not sure?"

"Precisely."

The detective arose.

"One thing more."

Bagshot hastened to make the remark.

Young Sleuth concluded he was acting on an after thought.

"Well?"

"About the girl?"

"The accomplice of Marvan?"

"The same."

"What of her?"

"She will seek to deceive you."

"How?"

"By means of some false story."

"To what end?" and Young Sleuth's eyes gleamed.

It was the light of discovery which flashed in his keen orbs.

"To make you think she is innocent."

"Oh, I understand."

"She will seek to win your sympathy."

"So I presume."

"She will tell you she has been cruelly treated."

"Indeed?"

"And Marvan will bear her out."

"Well, I shall know how to take all they say."

"Of course you will not credit anything?"

"Which Marvan or the girl may tell me?"

"That's it."

"I will not."

"Then I need say no more?"

"You need not."

Young Sleuth reached the door.

"Good-day," he said.

The other replied.

And the special passed out.

He closed the door.

Then he walked heavily along the hall.

And he reached the elevator.

He saw the hall was deserted.

The floor was thickly carpeted.

Noiselessly he retraced his steps.

Having reached the door of Bagshot's room without a sound he listened.

He heard Bagshot's voice.

The fellow was muttering to himself.

At first the officer could not make out a word.

But at length Bagshot's voice became more distinct.

Then the detective caught these words:

"I must prepare for the terrible ordeal."

Again the muttered words became indistinct.

But presently Young Sleuth caught the following remark:

"At midnight I must enter the dark circle of the Danites."

Bagshot became silent.

Still Young Sleuth remained at the door.

He hoped to hear more.

And he was not disappointed.

Bagshot spoke again.

He said:

"Then I shall take the oath of the Danites anew."

After that Young Sleuth waited for some time.

But Bagshot did not speak again.

Hearing footsteps the officer glided away.

The next moment a lady and gentleman turned a corner of the hall.

The detective proceeded to the elevator and descended.

He went directly to his rooms.

As he reached the door he heard the popping of a cork from within.

Suddenly he opened the door. There sat Jenkins with a bottle of champagne before him.

And he held a filled glass in his hand.

He seemed about to drink.

But, quick as a flash, he presented the glass to the special.

"Ah, you rascal! You will not obey the doctor's orders, though you are a victim of the gout, and all the physicians say you must not drink wine. Those who dance must pay the fiddler. I suppose we shall see you limping about to-morrow and hear you groaning, not to say swearing," said Young Sleuth, laughing.

"*Mon Dieu!* It is ever thus. The best intentions are misjudged. Could you, did you, for one moment think the noble Jean Guillaume St. Croix Jenkeau meant the wine for himself?"

"Well, it looked just a little bit that way."

"No, no! I saw you coming—from the window. I said, 'I will have a bottle ready. He will appreciate the kindness.' But alas—but never mind, a man who has had the gout don't mind trifles."

"Jenkins, you are a fraud! But here's to your health and confusion to the gout."

"Ah! You enthuse the noble Jean. Confusion to the gout, did you say? That is a toast! Can I let it pass without joining you? I who have suffered with that aristocratic but infernal complaint. *Sacre!* It must be done!"

And Jenkins poured out and drained a glass.

"You are incorrigible. You add fuel to the flames," and Young Sleuth laughed heartily.

Just then he saw an empty champagne bottle under the table.

"Open the bottle on the floor?" he said.

"Certainly. I will do so," and Jenkins picked up the bottle.

"*Mon Dieu!* What's this—empty? *Sacre!* Have we come to this?" he exclaimed.

"What?" asked Young Sleuth.

"That the McKinley Bill effects the consumers of the good juice of the grape. *Sacre!* The rascally importer has robbed this bottle to help pay the duty."

And Jenkins looked the picture of outraged innocence, though he had drained the last of the bottle himself just before Young Sleuth came in.

"The depravity of the consumer is to be blamed in this instance!" said the young detective, lightly.

"Ah, me, man's faith in man is a delusion and a snare."

"Nonsense! You can't fool me, you old humbug."

"Let it go at that, as Jacques the barber, a man who smells of hair oil said, when he took the ear of a customer who refused to pay for a five-cent shave."

"Jenkins, I've seen the agent."

"Of the author of the notes you got to-day?"

"The same."

"What did he say?"

Young Sleuth repeated his conversation with Bagshot.

"*Mon Dieu!* Did you drop?" exclaimed the Frenchman.

"To what?"

"To the point he made about the mademoiselle."

"About Bertina?"

"Yes. The dumb girl."

"I think so."

"You noted he said she would tell you a story."

"Exactly."

"Well, if she is dumb, how can she do that?"

"Right."

"It must be Bagshot knows the girl is not dumb."

"It would seem so."

"Yes."

"If Bertina was really dumb, Bagshot would have told me."

"I think so."

"This seems to almost establish the point."

"That the girl is shamming?"

"Yes."

"That's so."

"But that does not make her guilty of a crime?"

"No."

"I do not believe Bagshot's story," said Young Sleuth.

"Nor I."

"When he said Bertina was the accomplice of a murderer, I knew the man lied."

"The rascal!"

"Bertina can not be guilty of a crime."

"Perhaps Bagshot is acting for the Danites?"

"I know he is."

"How comes it you are sure?"

"I listened at his door."

"After you left his room?"

"Yes."

"What did you learn?"

"I overheard Bagshot's mutterings."

"What did he say?"

Young Sleuth repeated what he overheard.

"*Mon Dieu!* That settles it!"

"That Bagshot is one of Marvan's, otherwise Sandoval, the lion tamer's deadly foes?"

"Yes."

"Of course."

"And I mean to make a daring play soon."

"When?"

"To-night."

"What will you do?"

"Shadow Bagshot at midnight."

"Where to?"

"To the dark circle of the Danites."

CHAPTER VII.

YOUNG SLEUTH SETS IN FOR A DARING RUSE.

"How will you work?" asked Jenkins, a moment later.

"Bagshot said at midnight he must enter the dark circle of the Danites."

"Yes."

"I mean to enter, too."

"Ha! You will risk your life?"

"Yes."

"Let me accompany you."

"So you shall."

"Bravo!"

"That is to say, you shall go with me on the trail."

"Of Bagshot?"

"Yes."

"And enter the dark circle of the Mormon secret slayers with you?"

"No!"

"*Mon Dieu!* You give me disappointment."

"We must put up a stratagem."

"How?"

"I will explain."

"Do so."

"But first, let me say, I do not mean to risk my life without taking all possible precaution."

"To guard yourself?"

"Exactly."

"Go on with your plan."

"The meeting of the desperate league will no doubt take place where great precaution against the admission of a spy will be taken."

"No doubt."

"If we can shadow our man to the den, I think the ruse I have in mind will work."

"I hope so."

"The villain will probably have a doorkeeper on guard."

"Yes."

"I mean to personate him."

"Then your success depends—"

"Upon our being able to overpower the doorman without alarming his friends."

"And your being able to pass for him?"

"Yes. In the dark circle."

"Good?"

"You like the scheme?"

"I do."

"Then we'll try it."

"By all means."

"I am sure now Sandoval is an innocent man."

"So am I."

"And so I feel justified in playing Bagshot false."

"Certainly."

"For, by so doing, I can gain the ends of justice."

"Just so."

"Make up a bag of disguises."

"Certainly. I'll select a number."

"To take with us?"

"On Bagshot's trail?"

"Yes. For we don't know what kind of a make-up I may need."

"I'll have a good assortment along."

"All right."

"Do you think Bagshot is personally interested in the fate of Marvan?" asked Jenkins anon.

"I think he is acting for the Queen of the Avengers."

"Of whom Sandoval, otherwise Marvan, told us?"

"Yes, and I believe he is more particularly interested in the fate of Bertina than that of her protector."

"How came you to so decide?"

"I noted the voice of Bagshot became interested when he spoke of the girl."

"Good! Nothing escapes you."

The conversation was continued.

But what more was said need not here be re-produced.

suffice it to say that when the hour of eleven came that night Young Sleuth and Jenkins were on the pipe.

They were stationed near the Grand Central Hotel.

They had seen Bagshot at supper in the restaurant.

They had set in to watch for him to come out.

They knew he had left the restaurant.

But, as he had not appeared on the street, they concluded he had gone to his room.

The clocks of the city had just struck eleven.

Suddenly Young Sleuth grasped Jenkins' arm.

"What is it?"

The Frenchman asked the question in a whisper.

"Look there!"

Young Sleuth pointed.

A man was just issuing from the hotel.

Jenkins saw him.

"Bagshot!" he said.

"Yes."

The man walked up the street.

The detective and his assistant set in to follow him.

Jenkins carried a bag.

It contained a large number of disguises.

Presently the man Young Sleuth was trailing crossed Broadway.

Then he took a side street.

He went east.

And the shadowers continued to keep him in sight.

Bagshot's manner did not seem to indicate that he was aware of the fact that he was being followed.

He went on for a considerable distance.

At last he paused.

He had arrived at a private dwelling.

It was situated on a highly respectable east-side street.

Bagshot having halted looked up and down the street.

At that hour it was deserted save for the detective and Jenkins.

They crouched close to a wall in the angle of a tall building.

The shadows completely concealed them.

Bagshot appeared satisfied that he was not watched.

Then he went up the steps.

He rang the bell.

A slender, dark man, with an old, withered and evil-looking face, opened the portal.

He glanced keenly at Bagshot.

Then he stepped aside.

The door closed.

Young Sleuth whispered to Jenkins:

"I saw the doorman."

"So did I."

"But I did not make out his face. Yet I am pleased to note his appearance."

"Because he is a slender chap?"

"Yes, and because he is about my build."

"That's so."

"So if we can capture the fellow the facial make-up will be all that will trouble me."

"I hope that won't trouble you much."

"Now we'll wait a short time."

"And then?"

"We'll creep up to the door."

"Yes."

"I'll ring the bell."

"Just so."

"You will be crouching in the shadow beside the door."

"And when it opens?"

"When it opens, and while the doorman is looking at me, you will suddenly spring up and strike him down senseless with this."

Young Sleuth placed a slung-shot in the hands of Jenkins.

And he added:

"We have got to use harsh measures in this instance."

"Yes, but I'll take care not to hit the fellow too hard."

"If all goes well, we will then carry the doorman into the entrance of the large unoccupied building around the corner."

"And there you will make up?"

"Yes."

Having thus made sure that Jenkins fully understood his plans, Young Sleuth said no more for some moments.

But finally he observed:

"Now to put my plans to the test."

"I am with you."

"Come on."

They glided to the door of the house which Bagshot had entered.

In a moment they reached it.

With a slung-shot ready in his hand Jenkins took his position.

Then Young Sleuth rang just as he had seen Bagshot do.

The door was immediately opened.

The same man who had admitted Bagshot opened the portal.

He started as he saw the strange face of Young Sleuth.

And he opened his lips to ask a question.

One glance into the hall had assured the detective it was deserted.

He gave a signal with his hand behind his back.

Instantly Jenkins leaped up.

The weapon in his hand descended.

The doorman received the heavy blow on his skull.

He fell in a heap.

Young Sleuth dragged him through the door.

Then he closed it.

So far all had gone well.
 The special drew a deep breath of relief.
 Then to Jenkins:
 "Lend a hand here, quick!"
 "Yes. Here I am."
 And Jenkins grasped the prostrate man.
 Between them he and Young Sleuth carried him away.
 They reached the doorway around the corner.
 The doorman was unconscious.
 They met no one.
 In the arched entrance of the building they had reached Young Sleuth quickly exchanged outer garments with the man he had captured.
 Then, while Jenkins stood guard, he made up his face like that of the doorman.
 And he was not interrupted.
 Finally he bound his prisoner hard and fast, and also gagged him.
 The building was unoccupied.
 Leaving the prisoner in the dark arch, the disguised special glided back to the house Bagshot had entered.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DARK CIRCLE OF THE DANITES.

JENKINS followed.
 "You will wait outside," said Young Sleuth.
 "Suppose you want me?"
 "If possible I'll give you one of our secret signals."
 "But if you are unable to do so?"
 "I must take my chances."
 "You may be murdered in that house without my knowing anything about it."
 "Quite true."
 "You're a cool one."
 "I have to be."
 "Good-bye. Now for desperate, dangerous play for the secrets of guilty men."
 As he spoke Young Sleuth crept to the steps.
 He ascended.
 Having reached the door he tried it.
 It was not locked.
 That discovery assured him the doorman had not been missed.
 He passed into the house.
 Jenkins saw the door close behind his young master.
 Then he crouched down in the deepest shadows beside the steps.
 The devoted Frenchman felt extremely anxious on account of Young Sleuth.
 The time that ensued was, for Jenkins, a period of painful suspense.
 Still he had the utmost confidence in the ability of Young Sleuth to take care of himself.
 When the keen detective had closed the door, and found himself actually in the house, he felt triumphant.
 Cool and calm, with never a tremor in his nerves, he meant to play his daring part.
 But he must be guided by circumstances.
 He only hoped then that circumstances would favor him.
 That is to say, he hoped a way would be opened for him by the inmates of house to penetrate to the meeting-room of the Danites.
 He restrained his impatience.
 And he became seated on the hall bench.
 He resolved there to remain until some development of events gave him his cue to act.
 He had not long to wait.
 But a few moments elapsed.
 Then he heard footsteps.
 The sounds emanated from the rear of the house.
 A door at the end of the passage opened.
 A man appeared.
 He was Dyke, whom we briefly introduced to the reader as a Danite of the band under the Queen of the Avengers in a previous chapter.
 The red-haired, red-bearded ruffian stalked toward Young Sleuth.
 "I'm to take yer place, Bragg. Yer wanted down below," said Dyke.
 "All right."
 Young Sleuth then replied.
 Then, while Dyke sat down on the hall bench, the detective traversed the hall.
 He passed through the door by which Dyke had come.
 Then he found himself in a large room.
 There he paused to listen.
 Faint sounds from below reached him.
 And at the end of the apartment, through an open door, he saw the head of a flight of stairs.
 Young Sleuth reached the open door.
 His stout heart beat a trifle faster than previously as he began to descend the stairs.
 And he wondered what he was destined to encounter when he reached the foot of the flight.
 Down, down with firm and steady footsteps, until he stood on the basement floor below.
 There he reached an entry.
 A lamp hanging from the ceiling illuminated the place.
 Beyond it was a closed door.
 The sound of voices came from beyond the door.
 Unhesitatingly Young Sleuth proceeded to it.

At last he was at the very threshold of the meeting place of the Danites, under the Queen of the Avengers.

He tried the door and it yielded.

Then a strange scene met his vision.

There was a low, square room of considerable size. Standing in a row behind a small altar, upon which there rested a human skull and a pair of crossed daggers, were six men wearing long black robes and black masks. Each man held a murderous looking dagger raised as if to strike.

Before the altar knelt Bagshot.

As Young Sleuth entered and paused, enchained by the strange, weird scene, the man in the center of the masked six just behind the altar stepped back.

Then gliding from the shadows in the rear of the masked destroyers of the church of Utah came a magnificently tall female figure, clad in a closely fitting long trailed robe of black silk, and wearing upon her face a silk mask of the same color and material.

Her dark, luminous eyes flashed brilliantly through the holes in the mask.

And Young Sleuth gazing at her fixedly knew that he had seen those same eyes looking through a mask before.

Yes, the young special decided beyond all possibility of doubt that the female mask of that strange band of Avengers was really the masked lady, the female magician.

"Ha!" the detective said, mentally, "so Sandoval was right. The masked lady and Judith Hickman, the Danite queen, are one and the same."

The masked lady reached the altar.

Extending her jeweled hand over the head of the man who knelt before it, she said:

"Daniel Lee, in the name of Joseph Smith, the great apostle of the Mormon faith, and the founder of the church of the Latter Day Saints, I command you to repeat the oath I am about to pronounce, after me, and if you break it, may God have mercy on your soul, for you will be cut off 'behind the ears' by the chosen avengers of the church of Mormon."

Then the masked lady went on.

And she repeated a terrible oath.

Bagshot pronounced every word after her.

Then the masked Danites sheathed their daggers and the masked lady said to Bagshot:

"Arise, brother!"

He did so.

Thus far no one concerned in the strange ceremony had bestowed the slightest attention upon the detective.

He wondered at this, since the Danite who had taken his place at the door had said he was wanted.

He was immediately destined, however, to have his curiosity satisfied.

"Bragg," said the masked lady, turning to the young detective, "as secretary of the League of the Destroying Angels, you will now bring the book of the Danites, in which only the chosen ones must inscribe their names."

Young Sleuth bowed.

But he was in a dilemma.

Of course, he did not know where to find the book.

And yet a betrayal of his ignorance would be likely to cost him his life.

If suspicion was aroused against him, he would not be allowed to leave the house until the Danites had satisfied their doubts.

But never did Young Sleuth show to a better advantage than now, that he deserved the title of "the keen detective."

He noticed when the masked lady had last spoken she inadvertently glanced from him at the closed door of a closet in a corner.

"The book is there," decided Young Sleuth.

So he quickly crossed the room.

He reached the door of the closet.

Opening it he saw a large black book with a unique silver clasp on a shelf.

Beside the book was a great metal inkstand and a quill pen.

He took up the book and the inkstand and quill.

"Place them on the altar," said the masked lady.

Young Sleuth obeyed.

The masked lady opened the book, dipped the pen in the ink, and handed it to Bagshot.

"Your name was once erased from this book. The second time that is done will be the last," she said.

Bagshot took the pen and signed his name—Daniel Lee—in the book in the place she indicated.

"Now all is done. You are one of us again. Brethren, shake hands with Daniel Lee."

The six masked Danites obeyed.

Meantime Young Sleuth was thinking fast.

As the result of his cogitations he stepped up to the masked lady a moment later and said:

"I have heard from an old friend of other days to-day. He urges me to visit him in Buffalo. Can you spare me for a few days? If so I would like to go to Buffalo in the morning."

"All right! You have been faithful and willing. You can go."

"Thanks."

Then the masked lady led the way up out of the basement.

In the hall she dismissed Bagshot.

He passed to the street.

"Now, let all seek their beds. Good-night, brethren," said the masked lady.

With a wave of the hand she glided up the stairs and passed from sight.

The men one by one withdrew to their rooms, and finally Young Sleuth was left alone in the hall where he had pretended to be interested in a newspaper.

CHAPTER IX.

OUT OF THE DANITES' LAIR—AT THE HOME OF THE LION TAMER.

THE inspectors favorite young officer waited until the house became silent.

Then he noiselessly unfastened the door.

He glided out to the street.

And relocked the door from the outside.

To do that he employed a skeleton key.

He made it a point to have a bunch in his pocket on almost all occasions.

Jenkins had remained at his post.

He saw and recognized Young Sleuth, of course, as soon as the latter came upon the street.

They hastened away.

"*Mon Dieu!* It is a relief to see you. You got out alive, and that's more than I had begun to think you would do," he said.

"I had great luck."

"How so?"

"I spotted the masked lady."

"Tell me all."

"All right. I am here for that purpose."

Young Sleuth quickly acquainted Jenkins with all the incidents which had taken place in the house whence he had come.

"Again the noble Count Jean Guillaume St. Croix Jenkeau cries out bravo—ay, bravissimo!" exclaimed the excited Frenchman.

"And so you know now the Queen of the Avengers and the masked lady, the female magician, are one and the same."

"Yes."

"Judith Hickman is the masked lady's real name."

"It is, according to Sandoval."

"Well, here we are. What's to be done with this chap?"

They had reached the doorway, where they had left the Danite whom Young Sleuth had so successfully personated.

"I mean to work a deep game."

"How so?"

"We will have him locked up in a police station and have the matter kept a secret."

"Oh, I see."

"When I obtained the consent of the Queen of the Avengers for the absence of the supposed Bragg for a few days I had this plan in mind."

"You wanted to fix things so you could visit the masked lady in the character of the trusted Danite called Bragg again?"

"That's it."

"A great game. *Mon Dieu!* You have a head on your shoulders!"

"You didn't think I was a museum freak and carried my head on my heels?"

Young Sleuth was in good humor and he laughed in his light and boyish way.

"I suppose we had better make sure we don't get into trouble by carrying this chap to the station?"

"Certainly."

"He has regained his senses."

"So I perceive."

"I know where a night-hawk cab usually stands near here."

"Then make haste and bring it. I'll remain here with the captured Danite."

Jenkins hastened away.

He was not absent long.

When he returned he brought a cab with him, or rather the cab brought him, which amounts to the same thing.

The detective and Jenkins placed the Danite in the cab.

The gag prevented his making any outcry.

The cab was driven rapidly.

The distance to the nearest police station was soon made.

There the sergeant in charge was taken into Young Sleuth's confidence, in so far as it was necessary.

And the Danite called Bragg was locked up in a cell.

The sergeant agreed to keep the arrest a secret, and Young Sleuth and Jenkins went home.

But they had scarcely arrived there when the Frenchman exclaimed with a groan:

"Ah, me! I sometimes wish I didn't have quite so much of the blue blood of the noblemen of France in my veins!"

"Why so?"

"*Sacre!* The gout! I've got it again. In my right big toe. And I've got to go to a picnic to-morrow with the charming Dauphine. *Mon Dieu!* A gallant who limps is not particularly fascinating to the fair ones. And Jacques, the barber, a man who smells of hair-oil—my hated rival—will be there."

"To cut you out?"

"He carries a razor."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it will take a sharp one to sever the bonds of love. Love—oh, in my case, it means so much, for Dauphine's father keeps a

restaurant, and—and I put it to you—could he expect his beloved son-in-law that is to be to pay for his meals?"

"Certainly not. You bestow a title, and in this country, when a lady marries a title, she is expected to take care of the man who goes with it. It's the unwritten law of the '400.'"

Jenkins looked longingly at the door of the wine closet.

But Young Sleuth shook his head.

"You can't dance if the gout really gets hold of you, and what would your picnic on the morrow be if you couldn't trip the light fantastic toe?" he said.

"Ah, me, no wine! Then let's to bed! I would forget my troubles in dreams of the land that flows with beer and wine!"

The following day Young Sleuth called on Sandoval.

The lion tamer received the officer pleasantly.

"I scarcely expected to see you so soon again," said the former.

"I have called to make a report."

"What have you learned?"

"I have identified the masked lady as Judith Hickman."

"Good! Your swift success has far exceeded my most sanguine hopes."

"I will tell you all."

"Thank you. I would know all, that I may be prepared to meet my deadly foes at every point."

Young Sleuth then told the animal trainer how the agent of the masked lady had related to him the Danite's untrue version of the story of Sandoval's terrible experiences in Utah.

The animal trainer exclaimed in indignation:

"It is false—the whole story is! It is a base lie, concocted to ruin me!"

"I concede that."

"Ah, I am glad no doubt of my truth has entered your mind."

"Now," said Young Sleuth, "do you know this man Bagshot?"

"I know no one by that name."

"Do you know Daniel Lee? That was the name Bagshot was known by among the Mormons."

"No; that is, not personally. I heard his name while I was among the Mormons. But he was off as a missionary during my residence in Utah."

"Have you any friend here in New York who knows your story?"

"One."

"His name?"

"I know him as Jason Thyle."

"Describe him."

Sandoval did so.

"Your supposed friend is really Daniel Lee."

"Otherwise Bagshot?"

"Yes."

"You astonish me!"

"And you now know Bagshot—the man with three names—means to betray you."

"The infernal scoundrel!"

"Has he visited you lately?"

"No."

"Has he seen Bertina here?"

"He has not. But I met him not long ago on the street. He said he had been absent from the city. He looked pale as if he had been ill. We conversed. I told him about Bertina."

"Bagshot knows all about the girl."

"It must be so since he wishes to doom her to a fate worse than death."

"But he shall not succeed!"

"Not while I live. Why, I would sooner see that good, pure young girl alone in the den with my lions when they are hungry than see her in the power of that wretch."

"Precisely."

"And now that we know the truth—what?"

"Let us look at the case calmly."

"By all means."

"Well, then, we know the masked lady and Judith Hickman, the Queen of the Avengers, are one and the same."

"Yes."

"We know the man who professes to be your friend is an arch traitor and leagued with the Avengers—the Danites."

"All that is so."

"Very well. What we don't know and want to find out is the mystery of Bertina, the beautiful dumb girl."

CHAPTER X.

THE DUMB GIRL'S PERIL.

"CERTAINLY," assented the lion tamer to Young Sleuth's last remark, after a pause had occurred in the conversation.

"Bagshot knows the secret of Bertina's life."

"We have so decided."

"We must work to wrest the secret from him and not alarm him or the Danites. And, in the meantime, you will look out for yourself and Bertina, and I will do what I can to protect you both."

"And in the end?"

"We shall use the sealed packet containing the evidence of the terrible secret of the Queen of the Avengers."

After that Young Sleuth soon left the home of Sandoval.

He proceeded to his rooms.

There he held a conversation with Jenkins.

"I have been thinking of the strange case of Bertina, the dumb girl," he said.

"To what purpose?"

"I have succeeded in recalling something very like a precedent."

"How so?"

"I allude to the case of Kasper Hauser."

"Never heard of him."

"But I would like to hear about him," Jenkins added.

"So you shall."

"Go on."

"You will find Hauser's case briefly in the encyclopedias. It seems, just as Bertina was found unaccountably in the streets of New York, so Kasper Hauser was found wandering one morning in the streets of Nuremberg.

"His was the case of a man who could not talk because he had never heard language.

"He had been brought up in confinement in a cellar.

"For some mysterious reason various attempts were afterwards made upon his life.

"The last of these attempts succeeded.

"But before that those who found him taught him to talk."

"Do you suppose Bertina's case is really like that?"

"That she has been reared in confinement?"

"Yes, and never heard language."

"I might have suspected as much did she not readily understand what is said to her."

"And were it not for the virtual admission of Bagshot?"

"Which indicated he knows Bertina can talk?"

"Yes."

"The mystery of Bertina really interests me more than any point in the case."

"It is so with me."

"I am all curiosity to find out how that villain Bagshot is interwoven with the hidden strands of her life."

"So am I."

"Now I want to play a deep game."

"How so?"

"I want to make Bagshot confide the secret of Bertina's life to me."

"How will you proceed?"

"I shall pretend that I have found Bertina—or, rather, that I can deliver her to him, and that she has told me her story."

"I see."

"I dare not attempt this too soon, however."

"No. Too swift success might awaken suspicion."

"So I think."

"But I mean to shadow Bagshot."

"Good! I fancy you will find him spying upon his friend."

"Sandoval?"

"Yes."

"I think it probable."

That evening Young Sleuth, while on his way to the Grand Central Hotel cleverly disguised, spotted Bagshot on the street.

The man with three names was alone.

He walked up-town.

And Young Sleuth shadowed him.

The special soon observed that the treacherous rascal was proceeding in the direction of Sandoval's home.

The officer became intensely interested.

He wondered what the result of his pipe was to be.

He surmised of course that the home of the lion tamer was the destination of Bagshot.

At that hour the detective knew that the Animal King would be at the theater.

And Bertina would be alone in the apartments of the man who had become a foster-father to the mysterious wail.

Young Sleuth began to fear for the safety of the young girl.

He continued to keep Bagshot in sight.

The latter went on and on.

At length he turned into the street upon which the abode of the lion tamer was situated.

It was a small brick house.

It stood alone.

That is to say, there was a space on either side of it.

The front of the house was dark.

Not a single light was to be seen in any of the windows looking upon the street.

Bagshot paused before the house.

And he looked at it carefully.

Young Sleuth drew nearer.

For some moments the Danite remained motionless.

Then suddenly he glided along the eastern side wall.

Abruptly he paused and saw a light.

So did the stealthy shadow behind him.

The illumination came from a window.

Bagshot seemed to listen for a moment and then glided on.

He reached the window whence the light came.

There he paused again.

The curtain was only partially drawn.

Cautiously Bagshot peered into the room.

Young Sleuth stealthily crept away in the shadows opposite Bagshot; he, too, was able to look into the room.

This is what he saw:

Bertina was alone in the room.

She sat at a table.

One hand supported her fair head, and her whole attitude was one of unconscious grace.

Beautiful as a dream she looked.

In her lovely brown eyes there was a far-away look.

The detective believed she was thinking of her own past life and of happier days.

He looked from the mysterious girl to the Danite.

His dark face wore an expression of passionate desire.

He moved stealthily toward Young Sleuth.

But it was plain to the latter that Bagshot did not see him.

As it seemed it was his dangerous habit to do, the Danite began to mutter.

And in a moment he was leaning against the trunk of a great tree.

Young Sleuth stood close against the same tree on the opposite side.

"Curse her! I love her yet! Love her with a fierce, consuming passion! I cannot wait. The plot of the masked lady may fail. I may lose her," the villain muttered.

Young Sleuth heard every word.

"Yes. The scheme to take Bertina back to Utah with Marvan, otherwise Sandoval, may completely fail," Bagshot went on.

"Why may I not seize her now? Seize her and compel her to be mine. The lion tamer is away. There is no one near to protect her. I have my false key—one I had made some time ago from an impression I took of the door of this house."

He drew a key from his pocket.

Looking at it exultantly, he added:

"Yes, I'll do it. I'll surprise her, strangle her and carry her away. I have a secure retreat. Once let me get her there, and I defy the police and even Young Sleuth, whom I have deceived."

He moved away.

Young Sleuth saw him go to the front door.

Then he acted swiftly, and to good purpose, as we shall presently see.

Having reached the front door, Bagshot thrust his false key carefully into the lock.

He made no noise.

Cautiously he turned the key.

The bolt-lock yielded.

In another moment he silently opened the door.

Like a shadow he glided into the house.

He found himself in a dark hall.

Through it he advanced toward the room in which he had seen Bertina.

The floor was covered with heavy carpet.

It gave forth no sound under his feet.

He arrived at the door of the room occupied by the mysterious girl.

Suddenly he dashed the portal open.

And he meant to bound forward and seize the unprotected girl before she could utter a single cry.

But he paused upon the threshold as abruptly as if he had been shot.

He saw what astonished him.

Behind a table, in the center of the room, stood the dumb girl.

She held a leveled revolver in her hand, and as he appeared the girl took aim at him.

Her eyes flashed ominously.

No word passed her silent lips, but there was that in the expression of her pale, beautiful face, that told him it was death to him to advance a single step.

CHAPTER XI.

A BAFFLED VILLAIN—THE LION-GUARDED ROOM.

THE baffled villain stood enthralled.

Still keeping the weapon leveled at his heart, Bertina motioned for him to go.

"Curse you!" he hissed. "You've got the drop on me and I must obey. But this makes one more debt you will have to pay me with interest yet."

He retreated and dashed out of the house.

"She would have fired—she would have shot me down, if I had advanced. The tiger cat! She taught me a lesson when she stabbed me that night," he muttered.

He hastened away.

Evidently he concluded the dumb girl could not be taken by surprise that night.

But he muttered further to himself in a troubled way, as he went on:

"How did she know I was coming? How came it she was prepared for me?"

"I can't make it out."

"She did not look as if she anticipated any danger when I left the window."

"Then, too, I am sure she did not see me."

"There was no one near."

The rascal was sorely perplexed.

He could not satisfactorily explain what had taken place.

Young Sleuth could have done that.

Bertina owed her preservation to the young special.

No sooner had Bagshot left the great tree and glided away to the front door than the detective moved.

In a moment he reached the window.

Then he tapped gently.

Bertina heard him and looked up.

And she saw the face of the special

He glanced in at the window.
The dumb girl recognized him.
He signaled her.
She approached and opened the window.
"Take this!" said Young Sleuth.
He handed her a revolver.
She hesitated.
"You will need the weapon. In a moment a man will enter the room to surprise you. He is Daniel Lee," said Young Sleuth.
He spoke in a whisper.
But he knew she heard and understood.
Like a flash her small hand closed upon the weapon he tendered her.
At the mention of the name Daniel Lee she started.
And she turned pale as death.
The detective saw her tremble.
He knew then that she stood in deadly fear of the Danite.
And he was more than ever sure that the villain was concerned in the dark mystery of the fair sphynx.
"Listen," continued the detective, when she had accepted his revolver.
"When Lee enters, do you cover him. You understand?"
She bowed.
Then she closed the window.
Gliding behind the table she stood there.
And she leveled the detective's revolver at the door.
We have seen what ensued.
Crouching at the window and peering through a hole in the curtain Young Sleuth saw all.
He had purposely given Bagshot the name by which he had been known among the Mormons when he warned Bertina.
Clearly she had recognized the name.
From that it seemed to Young Sleuth that the girl must have known Bagshot among the people who called him Daniel Lee.
He saw the Danite hasten away.
Then he was joined at the window by the dumb girl.
She opened the portal.
And gave him her hand, while she looked at him with an expression of gratitude which spoke to his heart more eloquently than words.
He pressed her hand.
And he said:
"I promised Sandoval I would do all in my power to protect you, and I have kept my word."
She returned the pressure of his head.
Thus she signified that she appreciated his noble conduct.
"You knew that man—that Daniel Lee, in your old life?" he asked.
She shuddered.
"He is your enemy. I know that, but I wish I could learn all about why it is so."
She shook her head.
Whether this meant she could not or would not tell him, he knew not.
"Do you fear he will return?"
She looked her answer.
"Then I will remain with you until Sandoval comes home."
She nodded approval.
"I will go to the street door and enter, for I am sure the villain left it unlocked," he added.
He hastened away.
In a moment he entered the presence of Bertina.
There he remained for two hours.
At the expiration of that time the lion tamer returned.
"You here?" exclaimed Sandoval in surprise as he entered.
"As you see."
"How comes it you are here?"
"I've been on the trail to-night."
"Of my foes?"
"Yes. And I shadowed Bagshot here."
"Ha! And Bertina was alone?"
"Yes."
"What followed?"
Young Sleuth told Sandoval all.
"Bravely done," exclaimed the latter when the explanation was fully made.
"You see you must guard Bertina closely."
"Yes, and I shall. She will have strange but fierce guards soon."
"What do you mean?"
"To-morrow night my engagement at the theater ends."
"Indeed!"
"Yes, and then I shall bring my fierce, trained pets—my den of performing lions—home."
"Do you keep the lions here?"
"Yes, when I am not engaged."
"You must have a secure cage for the fierce animals?"
"Yes. Come with me and I will show you the quarters in which I keep the lions."
"Lead on."
Sandoval proceeded through a rear door.
Young Sleuth followed.
Along a passage went Sandoval.
At the end of it there was a door crossed by iron bars like the front of an animal cage.
"Look through the bars!" directed Sandoval.

The detective did so.
"What do you see?"
"A large room, the walls of which are plated with sheet iron."
"And there is one grated window?"
"Yes, high up in the side wall."
"You notice, too, the great cage is divided into two compartments."
"I do."
"One compartment is large, the other is small, and occupies the end of the cage opposite the door."
"Yes."
"In the rear wall of the cage opposite this door is another door?"
"I see it."
"Look here."
Sandoval worked a spring.
Then the grated door flew open.
"Follow me!" continued the lion tamer.
He entered the small compartment of the cage.
Then he passed to the door in the rear wall after closing the grated door behind him.
Young Sleuth still followed.
Sandoval opened the rear door.
The detective looked through it.
He saw a neat, well ventilated sleeping room.
"Now you can understand how I meant that in case of need Bertina would have fierce but faithful guards."
"The lions?"
"Yes."
"You see, they are kept in the large compartment of the cage."
"Just so."
"The smaller compartment forms a passageway to reach this room."
"I see."
"Bertina can flee to this apartment in case of need, and she has only to touch this spring in the wall beside the door of the sleeping room, to spring a door in the grating, which divides the small compartment from the lions. Then the fierce beasts—fierce to all but me who raised them from cubs—can enter the small compartment."
"And to reach Bertina a foe must pass through the den of lions?"
"Yes."
"Admirably planned."
"I constructed the den for my own safety."
"For a long time the lions were my guards at night. I slept in the room which can only be reached by passing through the smaller compartment of the den."
"Well, from this time I should advise that Bertina occupy the room behind the lions' den at night."
"So she shall."
"Bagshot may make another attempt."
"To abduct her?"
"Yes."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SECRET WARNING OF THE SERPENT HISS.

SANDOVAL led the way back to the room in which they had left Bertina.
He made the dumb girl understand by means of signs that he desired to converse with the detective alone.
Bertina retired, and Sandoval said:
"I can scarcely repress the strong desire I have to call Bagshot, or Lee, or Thyle, or by whichever name you may chose to designate him, to account at once."
"You must not do that."
"Very well; I trust my case in your hands."
"I must have more time to bring it to a successful issue, and solve the mystery of Bertina's life."
"You shall have all the time you want."
"Suppose I should fail—though, mind you, I am sure of success?"
"Then, as I live, I'll force Bagshot to reveal the truth about Bertina, or I will kill him."
Young Sleuth replied by telling Sandoval about the game of confidence he meant to work to induce Bagshot to give him the story of Bertina.
"Good!" said the lion tamer.
And he added:
"You will let me know at once if you succeed?"
"I will."
A little later Young Sleuth left the house.
Two days elapsed, during which the detective and Jenkins played a waiting game.
On the evening of the third day, after the occurrence of the incidents at the home of the lion tamer, Young Sleuth said to Jenkins:
"Now the time has come to work my ruse on Bagshot."
"Yes."
"Then you will call on him?"
"I will, to-night."
"Good luck!"
"That's what I hope for."
Half an hour later Young Sleuth left his rooms.
He proceeded to the Grand Central.
He was shown up to Bagshot's room.
The Danite received him.
And he hastened to say:
"I hope you have brought me news?"

"I have."
 "Excellent!"
 "You see I spotted a man who resembled the photo."
 "Where is he now?"
 "I don't know."
 "How is that?"
 "The fellow cunningly eluded me when I was following him."
 "What did you learn?"
 "There was a young girl with him."
 "Ah!"
 "Marvan called her Bertina."
 "So you thought he was Marvan?"
 "Yes. But the girl called him Sandoval."
 "That is a name he has assumed—I think."
 "Probably."
 "Go on with your report."
 "I followed the girl and the man on the street and listened to their conversation."

"Well?"
 "The girl called Bertina was telling the man she called Sandoval the story of her past life. I heard all. Bagshot, if she spoke the truth, you must explain away her evidence of your conduct."

"I forewarned you to believe nothing the girl might say."
 "I know that. But I did not dream that she would tell such a strange and seemingly true story."

"I see you have been taken in."
 "Perhaps."
 "It must be so. Bertina Merton told the man who had befriended her the story you overheard in order to win his sympathy."

"That may be."
 "I think I know the yarn. The desperate girl has deceived other people with it before. And I may as well tell you the story, so you will see she has used the same tale she concocted before."

At hearing this Young Sleuth was simply delighted.
 It seemed the Danite was about to walk into the trap and reveal the real history of the dumb girl.

But before Bagshot could say another word, an inexplicable and mysterious occurrence took place.

A hissing sound—like that of a serpent—suddenly came from beyond the closed door.

To the utter amazement and mystification of Young Sleuth Bagshot gave a tremendous start.

And he turned pale.
 "Excuse me," he said. "But on second thought I have decided not to relate the story which I know Bertina tells."

"As you will."
 "On the contrary, I request that you repeat to me the story which you overheard the girl repeat to the man you took for Marvan."

The eyes of Bagshot glittered.
 There was a look of triumph and menace in his orbs.
 The detective felt he was on dangerous ground.

It occurred to him the hissing sound from beyond the closed door was a signal.

He suspected there was some one without who had made the sound.

Perhaps it was a signal of the Danites to warn a brother of a spy.
 Young Sleuth determined to test his suspicion.

"Come in!" he cried, suddenly wheeling to the door and opening it.
 There was no one there.

"I thought I heard some one," said Young Sleuth to Bagshot, as he closed the door again.

"I heard no one."
 "Well, I suppose I was mistaken."

"Of course. But the story, you heard Bertina tell the man she called Sandoval?"

"Oh, yes, you shall have it," replied the wonderful detective, calmly.

He did not mean to be beaten in a game of wits.

He knew enough of Bertina's case to conjecture pretty certainly that the dumb girl had been cruelly treated. That she had been in Bagshot's power. He imagined other points.

So he said boldly:

"In substance, the story Bertina told amounted to this: She had been abducted from her home; she had been in your power; you treated her with cruelty; you placed her in danger of something she dreaded more than death; she escaped from you and fell in with Sandoval; her home was unhappy; she cared not to return; she feared to, indeed."

Young Sleuth paused.
 He had watched the face of Bagshot while he spoke.

But the fellow was on his guard.
 He maintained a stolid look.

From his expression the officer could not tell whether he had hit upon the truth or not.

"Very good. If you are to continue in the service of the party for whom I am acting you must not credit that yarn."

"Certainly not, if you assure me it is not true."

"I do so assure you."

"Very well, then."

"Try to strike the trail of the assassin and his girl accomplice again as soon as possible."

"I will."

"Have you anything further to report?"

"No."

"Then you must excuse me. I have an engagement at this hour."

"Certainly."

A few moments later Young Sleuth was upon the street.
 He did not like the turn things were taking.

That evening he held a consultation as usual with Jenkins.
 First he related what had taken place at the room of Bagshot.

Then he said:
 "What do you make of it all?"

"*Mon Dieu!* It seems to me the Danites are sharper than you thought."

"Then you think the masked lady has set a spy after me?"

"Yes. To make sure you were really working in the interest of the Avengers."

"Such is my suspicion."

"I take it the spy must have learned you were playing a double game."

"Working for Marvan?"

"Yes."

"And," continued Jenkins, "I believe a spy tracked you to Bagshot's room and uttered the hissing sound which you heard there."

"As a secret warning to the Danite?"

"Yes, as a warning to him to confide nothing to you."

"I am inclined to agree with you."

"I think it is important you should know positively if the Danites have discovered you are really the friend of the man they have engaged you to find and arrest."

"That's so."

"And I'll find out to-morrow."

"How will you proceed?"

"In the character of Bragg—the Danite—I shall return to the house in which the masked lady assembled the Avengers."

"Good!" cried Jenkins.

CHAPTER XIII.

STRUCK DOWN!

THE following afternoon Young Sleuth carefully made up once more to personate Bragg, the Danite.

He then proceeded to the house in which he had witnessed the meeting of the desperate league, presided over by the masked lady.

He was admitted by the ruffian called Dyke.

The latter said gruffly:
 "How are ye, Bragg? Got back from Buffalo all safe, eh?"

"Yes. How are things here?"

"Not altogether right, I fancy."

"How is that?"

"I don't want to say."

"Why not?"

"If the Danite queen wants you to know what's gone wrong, she'll tell you herself."

"Well, I don't doubt she'll confide everything to me."

"Perhaps."

"Here's the queen now."

As Dyke spoke, the inspector's favorite young officer turned.

He heard light footsteps on the stairs.

And he saw the masked lady descending.

"Ah, I am glad you have returned, Bragg!" cried the masked female.

"I am very glad to see you, Queen Judith."

"Step into the library, Bragg."

"Certainly."

The masked lady led the way from the hall through a side door.

The disguised detective followed.

The Queen of the Avengers closed the door.

"Now I have something important to say to you," she began.

"Yes, Queen Judith."

"You were fully in my confidence regarding my plot to have Donald Marvan arrested on the charge of murder, then get him extradited and take him back to Utah?"

"Yes."

"You know, too, that through Daniel Lee, known here as Richard Bagshot, I engaged Young Sleuth, the detective?"

"Yes, to find Marvan."

"And arrest him?"

"Precisely."

"Well, Bagshot seemed to think at the outset that I had made a mistake in selecting Young Sleuth as the detective I meant to make use of, as a tool, to blind the eyes of the law."

"Yes, I remember; you told me something of this, I believe."

"Now, in order to make sure that Young Sleuth did not play me false after Bagshot made a bargain with the young special, I set one of our band—Marks, the spy of the Avengers in Salt Lake City—to watch Young Sleuth."

"Indeed, I think that was a wise precaution."

"So the result proved."

"How so?"

"Marks made great discoveries."

"What are they?"

"He shadowed Young Sleuth."

"Yes."

"In that way Marks learned the detective was on friendly terms with a man known in the East as Sandoval, a lion tamer."

"Ah, and what more?"

"At first Marks, who did not personally know Donald Marvan in Utah, did not suspect the identity of the man called Sandoval."

"No."

"But later he overheard a thrilling conversation."

"Between the detective and Sandoval?"

"Yes."

"What was the nature of the talk?"

"From it Marks gleaned the alarming information that Sandoval was really Donald Marvan!"

"Ha! Then the man we have marked for vengeance is warned?"

"Yes, and the detective who played me false."

"The arch traitor!"

Young Sleuth threw an intonation of intense anger into his tone.

"Yes, the rascally detective has betrayed us, but the deed shall cost him his life!"

"How will you proceed to 'cut him off'?"

"He will be followed by Marks, until the appointed slayer gets a chance to make way with him, under circumstances of the utmost secrecy."

"A good plan."

"And now, since Marvan is fully informed of my presence here in New York, we must change our plans. Otherwise Young Sleuth will defeat us while pretending to work for us."

"Then you will not have Marvan arrested on the charge of murder, committed in Utah?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Marvan and the girl with him shall be secretly kidnapped."

"Ha! a bold plan."

"Yes. And instead of taking the slayer of my promised husband back to Utah as we planned, we will slay him here."

"But the secret!"

"Of the hidden treasure of the Danites?"

"Yes."

"Once in our power the secret shall be extorted from Marvan here."

"And the girl who is with Marvan?"

"She shall be delivered up to Bagshot."

"Well planned. But are you sure we can succeed?"

"I am reasonably certain we can."

"Marks deserves great credit."

"So he does. But for him Bagshot would have been betrayed into a revelation."

"Ah!"

"You see, at a timely moment, Marks, who had shadowed Young Sleuth to Bagshot's room, uttered the signal of the serpent hiss and fled."

"Well done, indeed!"

"I have decided to lose no time."

"In Marvan's case?"

"Certainly. To-morrow night the whole band of my chosen men from Utah will surprise Marvan and the girl and capture them."

"Then Marks has located them?"

"Yes. He did so by shadowing Young Sleuth."

"You will go with the band, of course," added the masked lady.

"Certainly—I am ready and willing to do so."

And while he spoke there was a great dread in his heart lest Marks, the cunning shadower of the avengers, had tracked him from his rooms and might at any moment appear at the house and denounce him.

"The band will leave here at ten to-morrow night."

"For Marvan's home?"

"Yes."

There was some further talk.

Then the masked lady signified that the interview was at an end.

And the disguised detective passed out of the room.

Not long after that he was directed by the masked lady to go out and make some purchases.

He gladly left the house of the Mormon avengers.

And he hastened to Jenkins.

To the Frenchman he related all.

And he directed the latter to lose no time in warning Sandoval of the approaching peril.

Then he returned to the house of the Danites.

Jenkins was greatly alarmed.

He feared Marks, the Danite, might have dropped to the secret that Young Sleuth was personating Bragg.

So, without saying a word about his intentions to his young master, he shadowed him when the latter set out to return to the house of the avengers.

Meantime, Marks, who had been absent from the house when Young Sleuth re-appeared there, had returned.

The spy was greatly excited.

He called for the masked lady.

She received him in the library.

"We have been duped. Bragg is a prisoner in a police station," he cried.

"How do you know?"

"I have seen him."

"When?"

"An hour ago."

"Impossible! At that time Bragg was here. He has returned from Buffalo."

"The man you took for Bragg was Young Sleuth."

"Heavens!" exclaimed the masked woman.

"It is so. I saw Bragg at a grated window of the police station. He told me how he came there. He has been a prisoner there ever since Bagshot took the oath anew."

"Tell me all."

Bragg had explained to Marks how he had been knocked senseless and robbed of his clothes, and then taken to the police station.

Marks told the whole story to the Queen of the Avengers.

"We will beat the treacherous detective yet!" the desperate woman cried.

"How?"

"In the disguise of Bragg he has just gone out."

"Will he return?"

"I think so."

"And then?"

"We will secure him."

"Good! Let us prepare for the capture."

"We will do so."

Then the masked lady called all the band together.

And she made known to them the startling news which Marks had brought.

A trap was set for Young Sleuth.

Meantime he was approaching the house.

Presently he reached it and rang the bell.

Dyke opened the door.

The next moment he fell under a terrible blow from the butt of a clubbed revolver in Dyke's hand.

The Danite slammed the door, and like a pack of human wolves the Avengers thronged into the hall and surrounded the detective as he lay insensible where he had fallen at Dyke's feet.

"We triumph now!" cried the Queen of the Avengers.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

"To the cellar with him!" added the masked lady.

"He is not dead. Shall I not finish him before we bury his body in the cellar?" asked Dyke.

And he placed the muzzle of his weapon at the head of Young Sleuth, and only waited for a single word from the masked lady to blow his brains out.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I want him to write an order for the release of Bragg before we slay him."

"Right!"

Dyke put up his weapon.

"Judith Hickman, the Danite Queen, never goes back on a brother! The detective must be compelled to get Bragg set free."

All assented.

Then the unconscious young officer was carried down to the cellar.

The Danites placed him in a small room there.

Then they went out.

And they locked and bolted the door.

The detective was left alone in the darkness.

Meantime, Jenkins had followed Young Sleuth all the way to the house of the Danites.

As Dyke had not closed the hall door when he struck Young Sleuth down the Frenchman witnessed that dastardly deed.

Instantly when the door closed Jenkins reached it.

With his ear at the keyhole he listened.

And he heard all.

Then he glided away.

"*Mon Dieu!* I am rejoiced that the cowardly blow did not kill my young master. Now I know he lives and is imprisoned in the cellar of that house."

Jenkins might have brought the police and raided the place.

But he decided not to do so.

He feared the Danites would murder Young Sleuth before the police could reach him if an open attempt at his rescue was made.

The cunning Frenchman had a scheme of his own in his mind.

And it may well be supposed he meant to rescue Young Sleuth.

He proceeded to the house of the lion tamer.

Sandoval met him at the door.

Jenkins hastened to tell the man the Avengers had doomed of the plan Young Sleuth had learned.

"I shall try to be prepared for them," said the animal man.

That night, after his final appearance at the theater, the Animal King had his lions—four splendid full-grown African beasts—conveyed to the great room-cage in his own house.

When the hour of midnight had passed Jenkins, completely disguised and provided with a burglar's kit, approached the house of the Avengers.

Single handed and alone he meant to rescue Young Sleuth.

Silently as a shadow he reached the basement door.

Then he listened for a moment, and then he set to work to pick the lock.

The task did not take him long.

Presently he noiselessly opened the door.

He wore felt shoes. He slipped inside.

Still no sound marked his movements.

Showing a faint light from a masked lantern, he began the search for Young Sleuth.

He found the door of the room in the cellar in which Young Sleuth was confined.

He tapped gently, giving one of his private signals. Then the voice of Young Sleuth reached him in a whisper. In a few moments Jenkins got the door open. And a little later he and Young Sleuth were safely out of the house. The next night came. Meanwhile, Young Sleuth planned to capture the Danites red handed if they attempted to carry out the plan of Judith Hickman, the masked lady, to kidnap Sandoval and Bertina. The night came on dark and gloomy. At about eleven, as Sandoval and Bertina sat alone in the room where Bagshot had attempted to surprise Bertina, waiting and watching for the coming of the Danites, the whip-like crack of a pistol rang out. A bullet crashed through the window and extinguished the only light in the room. At the same moment there came a tremendous crash at the street door. Sandoval had secured it with heavy bolts. But the portal had been broken down by a heavy timber in the hands of the Danites. They dashed into the house. "Quick, Bertina, Young Sleuth has failed us! He promised to be here with the police before the Danites came! We must reach the room behind the lions' den!" cried Sandoval, excitedly. He dashed for the room in question, holding Bertina by the hand and half dragging her with him. But as they reached the door of the smaller compartment of the lions' cage, through which they must pass to gain the rear room, the Danites pounced upon Sandoval. "Flee! Flee!" shouted the lion tamer to Bertina. She darted through the grated door. The lions were all in the large compartment. The brave girl reached the door in the rear wall and worked the spring which held the door, which shut the lions out of the smaller compartment. The door fell. The four lions leaped out into the smaller compartment of the cage. And their terrible roars seemed to shake the building. Bertina had left the door leading from the smaller compartment of the cage to the hall open. At that moment of supreme peril while the Animal King struggled like a modern gladiator to save his life from his deadly foes, he shouted: "Ho! Hannibal! Dragon! Moro! Gaskor!" It was the name of each of his four lions that he shouted. The trained beasts knew their master called them. With frightful roars the huge monsters came charging through the door of the smaller compartment of the cage into the hall. The scene was illuminated by the glare of the Danites' lanterns. They saw the lions coming. And with yells of terror they fled, leaving the hunted man, who stood at bay, in a corner with a dagger in each hand. Out into the night fled the Danites. After them charged the lions.

The next moment the sounds of voices shouting commands and the cracking of revolvers were heard. The truth was Young Sleuth arrived with a strong force of police just as the Danites fled. He had been unavoidably detained. He commanded the Danites to surrender. They showed fight. But when two of them had fallen the rest surrendered. They were handcuffed and hurried to prison. There was a great lion hunt that night. But assisted by Sandoval the four lions were finally driven into an empty house and captured. The following day Young Sleuth was at the home of the lion king at an early hour. He had first visited the boarding-house where the masked lady posed as the female magician, for he intended to arrest the Queen of the Avengers. The masked lady was not at the boarding-house, and the officer was informed she had not been there the preceding night. Then he went to the house of the Danites, accompanied by the police. But the house was deserted. He then came to tell Sandoval the masked lady had eluded him. He had just done so when Jenkins rushed in. "Mon Dieu! Such news! One of the Danites who was killed in the fight here last night, and who was taken to the morgue, has turned out to be the masked lady, Judith Hickman, disguised as a man!" announced Jenkins. "Dead! Ah, then you need never open the sealed package I gave you. But you know it contained the evidence—Judith Hickman was wanted for a terrible crime in Texas," said Sandoval. Just then Bertina entered. And to the surprise and delight of all, the seeming dumb girl spoke at last. "My friends," she said, "now that you have proven that you are not base, as I had learned to think all men were, but that you are true and noble, I will tell you all, and explain why I have pretended to be dumb, for it was a pretense. "Left an orphan at an early age, I passed into the hands of a cruel guardian who made my life miserable, until recently he sold me to Daniel Lee, otherwise Bagshot. My home was in Southern Utah. "Under pretense of placing me in a school in the East Bagshot decoyed me to New York. Then I discovered his purpose. "The night my noble friend Sandoval found me on the street I stabbed Bagshot in self-defense, and the blood on my sleeve came from his wound. I saw him fall and thought I had killed him, and I fled. To avoid telling anything I pretended to be dumb, and at first dreaded being called to account for the death of Bagshot. Then I dreaded lest I told where my home was I would be sent back to my cruel guardian. That is all." It was then and there agreed that Sandoval should adopt Bertina. Later he did so. The Danites were punished according to law, and Sandoval was never troubled more by Mormon foes. Later on, Bertina married a noble young man of her choice, and the Lion King and Young Sleuth will be the life-long friends of the young couple.

[THE END.]

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